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Calvin's Use of Scripture

by Lester DeKoster

"In this version I follow Erasmus, not because I prefer his view, but to allow the reader an opportunity of comparing his version with the Vulgate and with mine, and then choosing for himself" (Calvin on Ephesians 4:12).

The article which follows is a report. It is offered to the reader as introductory to his making a choice "for himself" among answers to a puzzling question. The question is a familiar one. It is, simply, what is one to understand concerning Calvin's view of the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures, judging both from how he treats the sacred text and from what he says of it?

There are schools of thought on this subject. Those who have already settled the question for themselves can adduce a host of witnesses who will testify on their behalf.

Dr. Kenneth Kantzer speaks for one group when he says flatly, "Calvin stands unequivocally for the view that the entire body of written Scriptures was dictated by the Spirit of God. His teaching is so clear and he reiterates his point so frequently, no other conclusion is possible" (in *Inspiration and Interpretation,* J. Walvoord, ed., pp. 138-39) Were the matter so evident as Dr. Kantzer finds it, there would hardly be the equally numerous students for whom one may choose Hermann Noltensmeier as spokesman: "One can as little assert Calvin's affirmation of verbal inspiration as he can that of Luther" (*Reformatorische Einheit,* p. 78)

There are those who believe that the *Institutes* lend weight to views like Dr. Kantzer's, while the *Commentaries* support Hermann Noltensmeier's conclusion. The problem is solved, then, at the expense of Calvin; and no doubt he has endured worse maltreatment.

So, then, as they say, you pays your money and takes your choice?

Not quite.

Taking your choice is quite in the spirit of Calvin; but only after you take a long look for yourself at the evidence he offers.

Start, say, with the *Institutes*: in Chapter 8 of Book IV we read: "Not one of the prophets opened his mouth, therefore, without having first received the words from the Lord." And, ". . . the apostles were the certain and authentic amanuenses of the Holy Spirit." *Prophets* and *apostles* together comprehend for Calvin the writers of the Bible, when he sums them up in a sentence.

So far with Dr. Kantzer's position; but in the same chapter there is this: "I confess that the disciples were ignorant, and not very docile, when the Lord made this declaration to them; but they were not so stupid, when they committed their doctrine to writing, as to render it necessary for them afterwards to supply in their discourses what they had from ignorance omitted in their writings." The Noltensmeier camp can make something out of this, though by itself perhaps very little.

But a glance at the commentary on Jeremiah serves to sharpen the issue. On chapter 1:34 Calvin is saying that "the Spirit dictated" in such a manner to the Prophet that Jeremiah "only executed what God commanded," and that God, therefore, was the "author" of Jeremiah's words. Who, then, was the author of chapter 20:16, about which Calvin writes: "And hence we also learn that the Prophet had no control over his feelings, but was wholly led away by a blind impulse, which made him utter very inconsiderate words; for in this sentence there is no piety nor humanity; but as I have said, the Prophet was ungrateful to men as well as to God . . . . We hence see how he was led away as it were by an insane impulse."

Probably we are by now curious enough to search further in the many pages of the Calvin landscape, alert to clues which may shed light on the question to which such writers as Kantzer and Noltensmeier (and many others) give such differing answers. What follows is a report of some landmarks which I have observed in touring some of Calviniana. When removed from their context, these landmarks may unintentionally give a false impression of the lie and contours of the countryside. I have tried to make them self-sufficient, and within the limits of space available, complete enough not to mislead. The reader is urged to look up the context of each for himself. This is simply a report.

Dictation

Calvin repeats once and again that God dictated the Scriptures:

". . . for the Holy Spirit has so regulated the writings which he has dictated to the Prophets and the Apostles . . ." (Hebrews 13:22).

"God therefore dictated to the Four Evangelists what they should write, in such a manner that, while each had his own part assigned him, the whole might be collected into one body; and it is our duty now to blend the Four by a mutual relation, so that we may permit ourselves to be taught by all of them, as by one mouth" (Introduction to St. John).

". . . God designed by the Apostles and Prophets to speak to us, and their mouths are the mouth of the only true God" (I Peter 1:25).

Similarly, as noticed before, in Jeremiah 1:34; also Hebrews 3:7, Matthew 22:43, Psalm 17:8, and other passages.

Accommodation

But God departs from strict accuracy sometimes simply to make His meaning clearer to our dull minds:

"When Christ says, that *the priests profane the Sabbath,* the expression is not strictly accurate, and is accommodated to his hearers; for when the Law enjoins men to abstain from their employments, it does not forbid them to perform the services of religion" (Matthew 12:5).

"For we know how God accommodates himself to the ordinary way of speaking, on account of our ignorance, and sometimes even, if I may be allowed the expression, stammers" (John 20:25).

So on John 3:12, Ezekiel 12:4, etc.

Correction

Whether because God "stammers" too much, or for other reasons, Calvin is sometimes constrained to correct the inspired writers:

"The repetition is therefore superfluous, and the Prophet means nothing else than that God will be avenged if the Israelites follow their own heart . . ." (Ezekiel 21:21).

"These repetitions I deem superfluous . . ." (I John 2:14).

"It is indeed an improper mode of speaking, to place contentions in the heart; but this affects not the meaning . . ." (James 3:14).

"The prophet, in this verse, mingles together two histories. Strict accuracy would have required him to have said in one connected sentence, Do to them as to the Midianites at the brook Kishon" (Psalm 83:9).

"The verb in the Hebrew is indeed in the past tense; but, since it is plain from the context that their hope for what was to come was founded on God's former mercies, I have preferred making the meaning clearer by translating it in the future" (Exodus 15:13).

"The verbs, *fall* and *put to flight,* in the Hebrew are in the future tense, but I have translated them in the present . . ." (Psalm 9:3).

"In the Greek words used by Paul the particle of comparison *as* is placed after *to every man;* but the order is inverted. Hence to make the meaning more apparent, I have rendered it *as to every man* rather than *to every man as*" (I Corinthians 3:5).

"When the Evangelist says that Gabbatha was the name of the place in Hebrew, he means the Chaldaic or Syriac language, which was then in common use; for in Hebrew *gagach* means to be lofty" (John 19:13).

Calvin was scrupulous enough about making such corrections on the original writer to avoid doing so when he could: "I have preferred, however, to render it *patterns* that I might not needlessly make any change upon the Greek phrase made use of by Paul . . ." (I Thessalonians 1:7).

Except that he spared not even our Lord Himself from at least oblique correction when he notices that in the Lord's Prayer the petition for daily bread precedes that for the forgiveness of sins: "Here it may be proper that we should be reminded of what I said a little before, that Christ, in arranging the prayers of his people, did not consider which was first or second in order . . . . We ought always, therefore, to begin with forgiveness of sins: for the first hope of being heard by God beams upon us, when we obtain this favor" (Matthew 6:12).

Such corrections of Prophet and Apostle abound in the Commentaries, as further in: Acts 3:44, Psalm 25:1, Galatians 5:9, Romans 5:18, I Corinthians 9:7, etc.

Accuracy

When he confronts the familiar "apparent contradictions" in the Bible, Calvin usually makes some effort to reconcile them, or brushes them aside as unimportant to the intent of the Spirit:

"He [Mark] appears to differ more openly from Matthew and from Luke in the narrative of chastising the traders . . . . But I reconcile them in this way . . ." (Matthew 21:10).

"Luke appears to represent this statement as having been spoken at another time; but this is easily explained" (Matthew 13:16).

"Though they differ [Paul and Moses] as to number, it is easy to reconcile them . . ." (I Corinthians 10:8).

"How the name of Jeremiah crept in, I confess that I do not know, nor do I give myself much trouble to inquire. The passage itself plainly shows that the name of Jeremiah had been put down by mistake, instead of Zechariah . . ." (Matthew 27:9).

"Mark uses the word *purple* instead of *scarlet;* but though these are different colors, we need not trouble ourselves much about the matter. That Christ was clothed with a costly garment is not probable; and hence we infer that it was not *purple,* but something that bore a resemblance to it" (Matthew 27:27).

"There is no reason why Luke should not narrate in the second place the temptation which Matthew recounts in the third place. For the Evangelists did not undertake to follow the course of history in such a way that the order of time should be scrupulously observed" (Matthew 4:5).

"Comparing the inspired history with the succession described by Matthew, it is evident that he has omitted three kings (Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah). Those who say he did so through forgetfulness cannot be listened to for a moment . . . . A more correct account is, that he resolved to confine the list of each class to fourteen kings, and gave himself little concern in making the selection" (Matthew 1:1-17).

"Whereas he saith that Jacob came into Egypt with 75 souls, it agreeth not with the words of Moses; for Moses maketh mention of 70 only . . . . Let us remember that it is not without cause that Paul doth forbid us to be too curious about genealogies. This, so small a number, is purposely expressed to the end that the power of God may the more plainly appear . . . . We ought rather to weigh the miracle which the Spirit commendeth unto us in this place, than to stand long about one letter, whereby the number is altered" (Acts 7:14).

There are places where Calvin simply questions the accuracy of the writer:

"If Matthew states the truth, they had openly declared by their language what was in their minds; and therefore Christ replies not to *their secret thoughts,* but to express words. But both may be true, that they spoke plainly, and yet that Christ discerned their secret thoughts" (Luke 6:8).

"The verb *to believe* has been inaccurately used by the Evangelist for the verb *to know* . . ." (John 17:21; an inaccuracy Calvin notes also on John 4:39 and 7:31).

"And whereas he saith afterward, they were laid in the sepulcher which Abraham had bought of the sons of Hemor, it is manifest that there is a fault in the word Abraham. For Abraham bought a double cave of Ephron the Hittite to bury his wife Sarah in; but Joseph was buried in another place, to wit, in the field which his father Jacob had bought of the sons of Hemor for an hundred lambs. Wherefore this place must be amended" (Acts 7:16).

"It now follows, *And ye have carried Sicuth your king.* This place, we know, is quoted by Stephen in the seventh chapter of the Acts; but he followed the Greek version; and the Greek translator, whoever he was, was mistaken as to the word *Sicuth,* and thought the name an appellative of the plural number, and supposed it to be derived from *suk,* which means a tabernacle; for he translated it, as if it was said, *Ye bore the tabernacle of your king instead of the ark.* But it was a manifest mistake; for the probability is, that *Sicuth* was the proper name of an idol" (Amos 5:26).

Calvin deals with parallel problems, in one way or another, on: Numbers 25:9, Psalm 51:9, Matthew 4:18, Luke 8:18, Matthew 13:16, I Corinthians 10:8, Acts 7:16, Psalm 136:7, etc.

But, again, he will sometimes make strenuous efforts to deny a very obvious difficulty:

"*And gave gifts to men*: There is rather more difficulty in this clause; for the words of the Psalm are *Thou hast received gifts for men,* while the Apostle changes this expression into *gave gifts,* and thus appears to exhibit an opposite meaning. Still there is no absurdity here; for Paul does not always quote the exact words of Scripture, but, after referring to the passage, satisfies himself with conveying the substance of it in his own language. Now it is clear that the *gifts* which David mentions were not *received* by God for himself, but for his people . . . . Since, therefore, the intention of *receiving* was *to give* gifts, Paul can hardly be said to have departed from the substance, whatever alteration there may be in the words" (Ephesians 4:8).

"Paul appears to explain this passage differently (in I Corinthians 2:9) and to torture it to a different purpose, and even quotes it in different words, that is, because he followed the Greek version. In this respect the Apostles were not squeamish; for they paid more attention to the matter than to the words . . ." (Isaiah 64:4).

"In using the expression *them that love him,* he [Paul] has followed the Greek interpreters, who have translated it in this way from having been misled by the resemblance between one letter and another; but as that did not affect the point in hand, he did not choose to depart from the common reading, as we frequently have occasion to observe how closely he follows the received version. Though the words, therefore, are not the same, there is no real difference of meaning" (I Corinthians 2:9).

And similarly on: Hebrews 9:18, Romans 3:4, Hebrews 3:9, Hebrews 10:5, Psalm 8:5, etc.

Temper

On the other hand, Calvin is not always minded to defend the mood or temper which comes to expression at the hand of the Scriptural writer, as we have already noticed regarding Jeremiah:

"We see that the Prophets sometimes complain, and seem also to permit themselves too much liberty when they expostulate with God, as we saw a memorable example in Jeremiah (xii and xx). Then we read also a similar one in Habakkuk (i). How so? Do the Prophets contend with God himself? Yea, they directly return to themselves, and collect into order all those wandering opinions by which they perceive that they were greatly disturbed . . ." (Ezekiel 9:9).

"As he had spoken rather harshly of the Law, he now mitigates or, as it were, corrects that asperity . . ." (Hebrews 7:19).

"Nor is it wonderful that a man endued with the Spirit of God was, as it were, so stunned and

stupified when sorrow overmastered him, as to allow unadvised words to escape from his lips . . ." (Psalm 88:5).

"I admit, that he speaks in a becoming manner, in acknowledging that there is no hope of his being restored to health, until God ceases to manifest his displeasure; but he errs in this, that he asks a respite, just that he may have time to die . . . . We might, indeed, regard the prayer as allowable, by understanding it in this sense . . . but we may easily infer, from the language which he employs, that his mind was so effected with the bitterness of his grief that he could not present a prayer pure and well seasoned with the sweetness of faith . . ." (Psalm 39:13).

The Meaning

However, the manifest intent of the Spirit often suffices:

"Some copies have *ye kill,* but I doubt not but that we ought to read *ye envy,* as I have rendered it; for the verb *to kill* does in no way suit the context" (James 4:2).

"The other two Evangelists express it somewhat differently . . . but the design of the Holy Spirit is beyond all doubt . . ." (Matthew 26:56).

"But as even the Greek copies do not agree, I dare not assert any thing on the subject. Since, however, the passage flows better when this clause is added, and as I see that it is found in the best and most approved copies, I am inclined to receive it as the true reading" (I John 5:7).

"We need not, however, feel anxiety as to particular terms, when the meaning is evident" (Philippians 1:27).

"As far, then, as the sense is concerned, there is no ambiguity, though the diction is, as I have said, rather obscure" (Ezekiel 7:26).

"And yet the Hebrew word, *toude,* will admit of no such meaning as a covenant; but as nothing is advanced but what is consistent with the thing itself, no scrupulous regard is to be paid to the meaning of a word" (Hebrews 9:19).

And much more like all of this there is, indeed, in the vast literature which John Calvin bequeathed his children. What was, then, his doctrine of inspiration? There have been those, as we have already noted, who know with enviable assurance precisely what to conclude in the whole matter. Perhaps it is more in the spirit of Calvin to go cautiously: ". . . but if any one thinks otherwise, I will not contend with him . . . . In things doubtful I only follow what seems probable" (Jude 15).

At all events, it is in keeping with the burden he lays upon us to study the matter for ourselves, and having done so, to "choose which he shall prefer" (John 20:25), be that the judgment of Kantzer, of Noltensmeier, or of those many who stand somewhere between.

The Pastor as Counselor

by Earl Jabay

AMONG the problems we least like to deal with are our emotional problems. Specific examples of emotional problems are alcoholism, sexual and marital problems, neurosis, psychosis, social maladjustments, grief problems, family problems, and the like. When a person finally deals with his problem it is because reason and circumstances seem to force him to take some remedial action. There are some who successfully solve their emotional problems without recourse to outside help; many others, however, feel they need a counselor. By the time these problems are brought to a counselor they are usually of sizable proportion and the call for his services is urgent. But not just any counselor will do. The counselor must be approachable, able to keep a secret; he must be understanding and helpful. Many feel that their pastor is the man who best meets these qualifications. A report from the United States Public Health Service tells us that over one quarter of a minister's time is spent in dealing with people who have emotional problems. This would indicate that many choose the pastor as their counselor.

I greatly admire the parishioner who has the wisdom to share his problem with his pastor, for it is frequently painful to share emotional problems. The mere thought of it is enough to make the timid retreat into the "safety" of their silence. It takes courage and a certain amount of inner security to share with the pastor the intimate revelations of a damaged life. It is no wonder that the parishioner enters his pastor's study with a pounding heart and a troubled mind. He needs help. "Pastor, things have gone far enough. I must confide in someone. Will you help me?"

The pastor surely wants to help but it is another question whether he can help. He is confronted with a choice: either he can refer the parishioner

to the specialists (such as marriage counselors, psychiatrists, social workers, Alcoholics Anonymous, etc.) or he himself can attempt to give help. Once the pastor has agreed to help the parishioner, the pastor assumes the role of a pastoral counselor and the counseling process begins.

But now, what to do? — and even more important, what not to do? This article is an attempt to help answer these questions. I propose to do this by distinguishing five different levels on which the pastoral counselor may work and also make a rough prediction of the degree of success he may expect on each level.

LET us look at Level One. A counselor functioning on this level says in effect to the counselee: "Now that I have heard your problem, it is plain to me what you should do. Do this and do that and if you do it my way you will find that it is the right way." That is extreme but it helps to make clear the attitude. This attitude, for example, looks upon the alcoholic as a man who needs "a good talking to." He must be told that drunkenness is a sin against God and that God wants him to stop drinking, and that unless he does stop, the penalties await him. And, I ask, who can deny it? This attitude is "correct," but it is not very helpful to the suffering alcoholic who may very well want to straighten out and sober up but finds that he is unable to do this.

Let us even assume that our alcoholic is a Christian — a man of prayer and faith before he became alcoholic. He has prayed and still is praying for a complete victory but each time he meets with defeat and he wonders if God hears and answers prayers. So now he turns hopefully and in desperation to his last resource — the pastor. The alcoholic turns to him not to be told what to do nor to be told what is right. All this he knows. Moreover, he still trusts God, but all the same he feels that every human means must quickly be utilized before he perishes! For his sake we hope that the counseling proffered on Level One will not be employed, for this is the level of commands, of ordering and forbidding. These were tried but they failed. Fortunately, few pastors work consistently in this fashion.

LEVEL Two is where the pastoral counselor says in effect: "Tell me your problem so that I may work it out and hand it back to you solved." The following is an example of a counselee who desired this of his counselor (who, however, resisted the temptation). This is the case of a man in prison who was very unhappy because his wife was losing interest in him. Her visits to the prison were as infrequent as her letters. Moreover, she threatened to divorce him. The inmate came to the counselor with his problem and requested that he write to his wife and "straighten things out." The counselor gently yet firmly refused to write the letter on the grounds (1) that a third party in an already tangled relationship would only further complicate it and (2) that such help was really not what the inmate needed. It was apparent from his life-story that this fellow had tremendous dependency needs, most of which were neurotic. By allowing the inmate to use him as a letter-writer the counselor felt he would be encouraging bad dependency habits and, even worse, quite innocently taking the problem out of the inmate's hands, relieving him of responsibility for its solution. It seems to me the counselor acted wisely. The counselor correctly discerned the deeper causes of this man's marital problems. The inmate appeared to be an adult but really was still operating on the infantile levels of dependency, helplessness, and irresponsibility. The inmate would not really be helped, therefore, if the counselor nursed along his neurotic dependency needs by taking the problem out of his hands and returning it to him solved.

ON Level Three, the pastoral counselor refuses to take responsibility for the counselee's problem and its solution. Instead, the pastor offers a sympathetic, listening ear. This is a vast improvement over the first two levels not only because it keeps the responsibility for the problem where it belongs but also because emotional catharsis is a very beneficial thing. There are literally thousands of people who, in the mad rush and hurry of life, tie themselves into emotional knots. They are anxious, frustrated, despairing and in need of a fellow traveler who will stop and do nothing but listen to them. Many people will talk and preach to them but few will listen. A friend of mine relates how a woman left his study, saying: "I can't understand why this talk has helped me. You have said very little. You are one of the few people who has shown real interest in me and given me the right-of-way in the conversation."

The listening ear is beneficial but it has its limitations. For one thing, emotional catharsis is a temporary help and not a lasting cure. New problems will once again "tie up" the counselee and it will again be necessary to pour out his soul to the counselor. This may be all that pastoral counselors can do for some people and they should not at all disdain such counseling. It is possible, however, to aim for more basic changes. And naturally, since counselors want to give the most help possible to the counselee, they should aim at some basic changes in attitude and feeling.

Another limitation of the "listening ear approach" is that it is virtually impossible for the counselor not to finish off with some words of advice and admonition. This has the effect of

making the counselee dependent upon a mind other than his own. If this is the counselor's aim, then fine and good. But if he hopes to bring people to maturity and to the point where they can make their own decisions before God, taking full responsibility for them, then he should allow the counselee to advise and admonish himself from the inward, regenerated resources which God has so generously given him.

NOW Level Four. Here the pastoral counselor says in effect: "You keep the problem but I will help you solve it by means of client-centered counseling." I have in mind here the method of counseling associated with the name of Dr. Carl Rogers and recommended by such leaders in the field of pastoral counseling as Dr. Seward Hiltner, Dr. Carrol Wise, and others.

It would be presumptuous of me to attempt anything like a full explanation of client-centered counseling. But I do want to take a quick glance at the method in the hope that some will see something which will cause them to investigate it more thoroughly. The first idea to grasp in client-centered counseling is that words represent feelings. What we really do with words is use them to express our feelings. A simple example of this is when I meet you on the street and say: "Hello, how are you?" This seems to be a very silly question, for obviously I can see that you look very well and if you were ill you would be home in bed. The question is foolish until we realize that my words are a cloak for my feelings. Now what are my feelings? My feelings are that I desire to give you the sound of my voice in a friendly tone in the hope that when you reply you will sound friendly. I feel the need for friends. Moreover, I feel warmly toward you and want to come closer as your friend but only if you give the signal to come closer by saying: "Just fine, thanks, and how are you?" Your words and tone of voice will indicate to me your feelings, whether they are loving or hostile.

In the counseling situation the largest part of the counselor's work is to distil the counselee's feelings, both negative and positive, from his verbalizations, and then return these feelings back to the counselee. To encourage the counselee to verbalize his feelings, the proper atmosphere must be created by the counselor. The counselor will encourage rapport by means of his warmth and responsiveness; he will allow complete freedom in the expression of feeling, the only exceptions being the time limit of the interview and the prevention of physical harm to the counselor or his property); he will refrain from coercion, pressure and moralistic criticism. Under these conditions tremendous things begin to happen in the psychic life of the counselee. He begins to become aware of his own feelings, perhaps for the first time since babyhood. In the counseling room he begins to find his real self buried deep under layer after layer of neurotic defense. Now, with his real feelings expressed, *he,* not the counselor, begins to work through his problems. He begins to see old facts in new relationships, and gradually a healthy self-understanding and self-acceptance emerge. The counselee finds that the counseling room is a safe place to do this, for no matter what he says or feels, his counselor loves, accepts, understands, and respects him. At last, in this dangerous and difficult old world it is safe to grow, hopefully, to a maturity sufficient to deal with the problems of the future.

To illustrate this method very briefly, I quote from an interview I had with a man who was contemplating suicide.

He: I have been here for six months and I have had nothing but trouble for myself and worry about my family. I am at the end of my rope. (tears)

I: You feel overwhelmed by the failure of your plans — it has been a great disappointment.

He: I never knew bitterness such as I now have. It is too much. I will not deny it — I plan to commit suicide.

I: From your point of view, it is better to end such misery as you suffer by doing away with yourself.

He: It is better that I die. Better for my children. Oh, how I love them . . . and they me.

I: You feel your suicide would bring some benefits to your children but also hurt them.

He: And I have hurt them so much already. (tears)

I: And this, in turn, hurts you.

It was by means of such counseling that this man found a measure of health sufficient to keep from suicide. I am especially happy to report that at the moment he began to discover himself as a person and the healing had begun, he became aware of his spiritual needs and turned to God. One pastoral counselor with considerable experience tells me that this simultaneous discovery of the self and God is not at all uncommon. I am struck with the effectiveness and depth of this kind of evangelism.

FINALLY, Level Five. Here the pastoral counselor says in effect: "Yes, I have done a little reading in psychiatry and I think I know enough about it to cure you." In the hands of people who are well-trained, dynamic psychiatry is a wonderful instrument. In the hands of amateurs, few things are more dangerous. Pastors should remember, therefore, that they are pastors and not psychiatrists. By God's mercy, in these crucial latter days pastoral counselors have been given an effec-

tive and safe tool to use — client-centered counseling — for the alleviation of the distress and suffering so many endure because of emotional problems. Dynamic psychiatry is effective in dealing with the more serious emotional and mental disorders and for that reason we may think of it as a Fifth Level, but it is safely employed only in the hands of those who have had years of specialized training. Very few ministers have had such training. Happily for the pastor, there is some statistical evidence to indicate that both types of therapy used in their proper places are equally effective.

Pastoral counselors have a large field to harvest for the Lord. Their task is to stand in the fields white unto harvest as men humbly representing God, guiding lost men and women out of the labyrinth of confusion, loving the unlovable, accepting those who are rejected, understanding the misunderstood, respecting the disreputable, witnessing to a gospel of love and salvation through Jesus Christ the Lord. Many pastors testify that as they grow in the art of pastoral counseling, they grow not only in ability to serve God's children but *they* grow and as they grow, somehow God is better known, experienced and glorified.

MAKING DOCTRINE REAL

by Edwin Walhout

ALL Christian education must take into account two fundamental factors: the positive factor of creation and the negative factor of sin. Because of the creation of man in the image of God Christian education must seek to develop the created potential of each student, but because of sin Christian education must supply pre-determined and authoritative direction to this self-development. The natural talents distributed by God to every individual provide both the possibility and the necessity of education as such, whereas the renewal and re-orientation of redemption in Christ provides the imperative of Christian education.

Christian education, therefore, may never permit these two factors to be isolated from each other. Because the individual student is an organic whole, his education, too, must be organically integrated. Both the creative and the redemptive factors must be correlated, not only in terms of mutually consistent subject matter, but also in terms of producing in the student a well-integrated, coherent, and realistic understanding of life under God. The teaching of the general liberal arts curriculum and the teaching of the special theological curriculum may not remain bifurcated into unrelated parallel units. Truth is one. The mind is one. The person is one.

Both a comprehensive liberal education without a theological orientation, and a thorough religious indoctrination divorced from the cumulation of human knowledge are inadequate and unrealistic. These are the shortcomings respectively of the secular school and the Bible Institute. This observation is, therefore, the warrant for our unique system of schools from kindergarten through college. In these schools the attempt is made daily to produce a sound and thorough understanding of natural revelation, and to orient that understanding to the new perspective involved in redemption. The command to subdue the earth is properly taken to be the basis of general education as such, and the command to train up a child in the way he should go necessitates the introduction of the various courses in religious instruction.

NEVERTHELESS, an unhappy divorce of these two areas appears to be a not unreal problem even in the Reformed religious community. The problem is how to absorb the overwhelming mass of modern knowledge into the orthodox theological framework. Upon occasion, natural revelation bares an inadequacy in current understandings of special revelation, as for example, the corrections of ideas concerning the relation of sun and earth, of the form of the earth, and of the age of the earth. Also upon occasion, special revelation provides necessary checks to theories explaining natural revelation, as for example, concerning the theory of evolution and the evolution of religion. The mutual give-and-take of natural and special revelation is a must for a well-integrated Christian education. Where reluctance to yield to truth is evident from either side, there the organic unity of Christian education is jeopardized.

From my own observations it appears that the greatest failings in this problem lie with those who represent the theological side of truth. My religious education was almost invariably given as an independent body of knowledge which seldom impinged upon so-called secular knowledge. Catechism, Sunday school, and Bible period in school all seemed to combine in producing in me an intellectual schizophrenia. While the theological system

presented to me aroused and maintained my loyal commitment, its relevance to the other concerns of my life was not made vitally clear. Thus, to an altogether large extent, religious doctrine was abstracted from my life in this world.

I am persuaded also that what was true for me personally is also true for many others, highly educated leaders and average church members. Side by side in the same person exist mutually incompatible attitudes and goals: the commitment to Christ and to making money, the exaltation of Christian love and an acrimonious personality, the denial of self and the seeking of self.

Being a teacher myself I have no desire to place responsibility upon religious teachers for inconsistent living by their students. The responsibility is primarily with each individual before his Lord, Jesus Christ. Yet I suspect strongly that the teaching *method* which has arisen within the Reformed community has contributed to this situation.

Fundamental to this method is the assumption that the Reformed faith is an independent closed system of truth. In a sense, of course, this is true, namely, that it is coherent and that it does not depend upon human insight. However, when the Reformed faith is regarded as independent from discoveries in the various fields of scientific endeavor, the attitude is inculcated that natural revelation and special revelation are unrelated, and possibly even that scientific endeavor is dangerous and inimical to faith.

Further, the current method — exemplified best in the teaching of catechism classes — relies heavily upon the pedagogical technique of memorization. At worst — and I doubt whether any teacher would be content with this — this method results in pure parroting and that which is parroted has no more effect upon a person than upon a parrot. At best, this method can produce a real understanding of Christian teaching as a coherent intellectual system. As currently employed, from early catechism days, through high school and college doctrine courses, to seminary itself, this method, even when it produces a competent understanding of the system itself, cannot possibly produce an integrated and organic world-and-life-view which encompasses the totality of life and reality. This is to say that the special revelation, when abstracted from natural revelation, is meaningless. The constant and co-operative interaction of both areas of truth is prerequisite to a meaningful and satisfying understanding of the organic unity of life under God.

I would like to sketch what I consider to be some of the essential elements in the teaching of doctrine — at any level. These elements are three, as follows: (1) The Definition of the Problem, (2) The Analysis of Alternative Answers to the Problem, and (3) The Articulation of the Christian Answer to the Problem.

(1) *The Definition of the Problem.* Judging again by my own experience, one of the greatest defects in the current method of teaching doctrine lies in this area. Theological answers and formulae are presented, and required to be memorized and explained in terms of their coherence with the theological system. This in itself is necessary and good. But unless the student has been led to see these answers in terms of the questions they answer, the understandings achieved will tend to become intellectual idols. That is to say, such formulae tend to elicit allegiance to themselves rather than to produce a meaningful and relevant understanding of some vital aspect of our life before our Creator and Redeemer. It appears, therefore, that before the theological formula can be properly understood and appreciated it must be seen in connection with the living relationship between man and God and the world. This means that the teacher must lead his students to grapple with some of the important questions which mankind has confronted. The students must themselves personally and realistically attempt to think through to an answer to the particular problem under consideration. The teacher can accomplish this task in various ways, but the important thing is that the students come to appreciate that there is a real problem involved, to which a solution must be found.

(2) *The Analysis of Alternative Answers.* This area of doctrinal teaching has also been somewhat neglected, though in my judgment not so seriously as the first. At times alternative answers are not presented honestly, so that students react with the attitude, "How could anyone be so stupid?" Now to some extent such a reaction is not entirely objectionable, for we do wish our students to feel the inherent rationality and superiority of the Christian answer. But when such a reaction stems from a failure to appreciate that the alternative answer is a real attempt to solve a problem from a different point of view and within a different set of presuppositions, or from a failure to delineate the problem clearly, then such an attitude is dishonest and unfair. When, however, the teacher can lead his students through such alternative solutions "from the inside," that is, from the perspective of the presuppositions of the other position, and then bring the students to a realization of the inherent inadequacy of such answers, then the teacher has properly done this part of his work.

(3) *The Articulation of the Christian Answer.* If the first two elements of doctrinal teaching are done adequately, the stage will have been set for a powerful thrusting home of the Christian doctrine

under consideration. Actually the teaching of the Reformed position will have been immeasurably simplified, for the students themselves will have sensed the direction in which the correct answer must be found. The teaching aspect of this point will merely be the articulation of this more or less vague sensing of direction.

These three points of methodology need not be treated consecutively in the given order. The order may be reversed, for example as follows: "This is the Reformed position; what difference would it make if one were to deny it? What other possible answers could be given?" I have attempted only to analyze the elements which go into effective teaching of doctrine; the order may be adjusted to suit the needs and abilities of teacher and student.

I wish to make two concluding observations concerning the teacher himself.

(1) The pedagogical methodology outlined above requires that the teacher be able to meet his students at their level. To do this he must make a reasonably accurate appraisal of their mental capacity and achievement. This is necessary in order to avoid two errors: first, that of introducing problems that the students have solved for themselves previously and, second, that of introducing problems that the students are not yet ready or competent to confront.

(2) The teacher must himself have realistically and honestly gone through the same intellectual process of confronting real problems and of coming up with compellingly valid Christian solutions. He cannot expect to lead his students to understand the inherent compulsion of Biblical truth unless he has come to understand it himself. Truth cannot satisfactorily be taught disinterestedly, that is, as someone else's answers to someone else's problems. The problems must be real to the teacher before they can become real to the student, and the same is true for the answers.

This approach to the teaching of Reformed doctrine retains, I think, all that is good in our present methodology while it provides for that *sine qua non* of all teaching: relevance.

"If It Be Thy Will"

by Henry M. De Rooy

THE young church seemed in danger of extinction. "Six years after its organization the number of families had dwindled to 11. Prayers and supplications ascended to the throne of God, that His will might be done in this seemingly hopeless situation. But the dark days passed. Hope rose anew. Prayers were answered, and the Lord added to our number."

The quotation is from an article signed by "The Consistory" and placed in a church paper to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of a congregation. It is an unremarkable statement. Similar ones might be found in any other issue of the same magazine.

However, though we no longer think such statements remarkable, there is revealed here an attitude toward prayer which ought to be remarked upon. Did you notice the conjunction *but?* "Prayers and supplications ascended to the throne of God. . . . *But* the dark days passed." Almost any other conjunction would have done — *wherefore, therefore, so, then,* or the simple *and.* Instead we find *but.* We needed a blessing, they say, and we prayed for a blessing, *but* God blessed us. True, farther on we read, "Prayers were answered." But why was not this said the first time? Though we read this tardy statement and believe it, we still have in our minds the contradictory idea introduced by that unfortunate conjunction.

Do we read too much into a hastily written article? Or is this actually a symptom of a disease which has attacked our prayers — a disease which we have shared so long that when we are among our fellow sufferers, we do not notice it?

The article betrays, I believe, a deficiency of faith in our prayers. We frequently doubt whether our prayers will accomplish *anything.* We *must* pray, for we have been commanded to pray without ceasing. But even while we pray, our minds consider the alternative step, what we shall do after the prayer has not been granted. We need not take our umbrellas to a prayer service in drought, but neither must we be planning on the way to church which of our crops will be the first plowed under.

To locate a source of this trouble — a compost in which the bacteria feeds — we look again at the above quotation. "Prayers and supplications ascended to the throne of God, *that His will might be done* in this seemingly hopeless situation." The italicized expression is ambiguous. What is meant? That the congregation might be courageous as God has commanded? Or that the decree of God, writ-

ten in eternity, might be accomplished? Is it a prayer for guidance in remedial action, or is it a prayer of resignation? The phrase "in this seemingly hopeless situation" indicates that this was an expression of resignation. So does the statement that "hope rose anew" — apparently not after the congregation had prayed but after "the dark days passed."

Be that as it may, we all will recognize another form of the italicized expression as one which occurs frequently in our prayers: "If it be Thy will." Beside a hospital bed, a friend prays for the restoration of a loved one, "if it be Thy will." When war threatens, a congregation prays for peace, "if it be Thy will."

This expression (with the notions that underlie its frequent use) is an offense to our prayer life. It saps our prayers of power, it robs them of sincerity. If this clause has any rightful place in our prayers, it must be a small one. It ought not be employed on the present scale. It is an enemy which has infiltrated almost all our prayers and now ought to be either driven out or contained.

IT is no news that our doctrine and practice of prayer is complicated by our dogma of the decrees. This dogma is formulated upon the clear Biblical teaching that from eternity God has foreordained all things that come to pass. Every moment of our history has been laid out in the mind of God before the first act of creation. All things that happen today are realizations of the foreordination and foreknowledge of God. This decree we often call the will of God.

But there is another aspect of the will of God — His preceptive will. This is the will of God which is enshrined in the summary of the law and exposited in the Decalogue.

Let us, then, in this discussion, distinguish clearly between these two meanings of "the will of God." Let us call the first His decree, and the second His precept.

Let it be granted that when we pray "if it be Thy will" we generally refer to the decree. This must be so when we use the phrase in cases of extreme need — when a loved one is dying, when war threatens, when our livelihood is imperiled. Indeed, it must always be so when we use that particular clause, for there is obviously a question in our minds respecting what God's will may be. His preceptive will is clear enough, so the decretive will must be refered to. Other expressions of the same idea (for example the one used in the article quoted above — "that His will might be done") also are usually references to God's decree.

When we thus allude to the decree, we are stepping out of bounds. We often refer to the decree as the *secret* will of God. We ought not inquire into the secret things of God. Yet to condition our prayers upon His decree is a form of inquiring into that decree. We are showing curiosity about what the decree may be. Luther says, "This will is not to be inquired into, but reverently adored, as by far the most awesome secret of the Divine majesty. He has kept it to Himself and forbidden us to know it. . . . Wherever God hides Himself and wills to be unknown to us, there we have no concern" (*Bondage of the Will*, IV, x).

The decree should not be drawn into our prayer. Surely, we may praise God in our prayer because He is a sovereign God and has decreed all things. But this is not inquiring into the *content* of the decree; rather, it is, as Luther advises, reverently adoring the decree. However, when we pray for a thing and condition that prayer upon the decree of God, we are inquiring where we have no business.

We have no business praying that God's decree may be carried out. To praise God for having carried it out and to express faith that He can continue to accomplish it, is right; but to condition our prayers upon the decree is wrong. We have no business praying, in that sense, "Thy will be done."

Surely, if we must pray "Thy will [i.e., decree] be done" in reference to a sick friend or an impending war, we must also pray it in reference to a wayward child: "Lord, lead our son back to his childhood faith — if it be Thy will." This would be a peculiar prayer. Or take another example: we know that *all* things are decreed. Our sins too. Tomorrow we shall commit sins which were (permissively) decreed in eternity. What will our prayer be with reference to this knowledge when we retire tonight? "Lord, thy will be done"? No; instead it will be "Lord, deliver us from *every* temptation." And if a prophet should tell us that tomorrow we would embezzle from our employer, would we not spend the entire night praying for some change in what we had every reason to believe was God's decree?

We have no duty to act according to God's decrees. They are not given us as a guide for our life. Rather, they include the sins we shall commit. We *do* have a duty with reference to the *precept* — we are to obey it in thought, word, and deed. But we cannot obey the *decree*, simply because the decree has no moral implication for us, outside Luther's "reverent adoration."

IT is said that the expression "if it be Thy will" in our prayers is evidence of submission. One who prays this, so the argument goes, places his life or his dear ones in God's hands — leaves the disposition of the thing up to God, and declares his readiness to concur in what God disposes.

Submission, however, is shown in many ways. And perhaps some things that we take as evidence of submission are in fact betrayals of a fatalistic resignation. Surely the very fact that a Christian

prays is the best evidence of submission. I pray because I *know* that my life and all persons and things dear to me are in God's hands. I ask Him to protect or restore persons or things dear to me because I trust in His power to do these things. And yet my very prayer, if sincerely offered, comes from a heart that loves God and knows that He loves me — a heart that will in the end accept His possible negative disposition.

Submission is not a matter for one's prayers alone. It ought to characterize our entire life — the occupation we select, the way we spend our money, the attitude we display in dealing with members of our family, our church, and our community. One who submits to God's will (i.e., precept) in these things need not fear that his prayer for a person or thing dear to him will be unheard because he neglected to add to his petition "if it be Thy will."

He *ought not* add these words because they betray a lack of faith. When one uses them, he is resigning himself to something that has not yet happened and may never happen. Can we resign ourselves today to something which cannot happen until tomorrow, and may not happen even then? People who resign themselves to possible future catastrophes we call pessimists. The Christian ought to be an optimist — above all in his prayers.

Ought we not rather to pray for what we wish to be done in faith that God *will* do it? Should we not pray for strength of spirit to do God's *revealed* will, and forget a secret will whose content we cannot know? We have no obligation to complete God's secret will — it is not a guide but a comfort, it demands not obedience, but humility. We *do* have a moral obligation with respect to the *revealed* will, the precept. Grace to do this will ought to be an objective of prayer. But hear Luther again: "We must keep in view His Word and leave alone His inscrutable Will; for it is by His Word and not by His inscrutable Will that we must be guided. . . . It is enough simply to know that there is in God an inscrutable Will; what, why, and within what limits It wills, it is wholly unlawful to inquire, or wish to know, *or be concerned about,* or touch upon; we may only fear and adore" (*ibid.;* italics mine).

IF we will make this change in our prayers, the effect will be far-reaching. Why are our prayers so often unanswered? It is because we do not really expect an answer as we should. As we pray, we fear that the decree may be the opposite of our wish. And so we hedge our request — we bring in the decree when we have no business — by way of preparing ourselves for a rejection.

The Bible has taught us to pray not doubting, but believing. Consider the many wonderful promises Jesus makes concerning what God will do in answer to our prayers. In all these promises, Jesus did not once say that our prayer would be answered "if it be God's will," i.e., if it be consistent with His plan for the future. We are told by Him to pray in faith, and to believe that we will receive what we ask for. That's all. "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do." "Verily, verily . . . if ye ask anything of the Father, he will give it you in my name." "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them." "Ask and it shall be given unto you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Notice how broad and free these promises are. Notice that in the first three of them we read not, "the things that the Father has decreed for you," but *whatsoever, anything,* and again *anything.*

When praying for Himself, however, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus did say, "Not my will, but thine be done." Some have cited this as an instance in which Jesus prays that the decree might be carried out. That is, they say that Jesus is here resigning Himself to the eternal counsel of God concerning His sacrifice. But look closely at the circumstances in which the prayer was offered. Jesus was a man as truly as any of us. He was subject to all our temptations and fears. Especially in the Garden He faced the temptation to push away the bitter cup which He had been commanded to drink. And so He prays for strength. Knowing that only in this way can His people's sins be atoned for, He prays for the needed courage, and He sighs and says He *will* do it — that is, He will obey "the commandment I have from my Father." Is this, then, primarily a prayer for the accomplishment of the decree? Or is it primarily a prayer, such as we all ought to offer, that He might do God's *revealed* (to Him) will? He is praying not, "Thy will be done *in spite* of me"; nor even, "Thy will be done *upon* me"; nor hardly even, "Thy will be done *through* me"; He prays, "Thy will be done *by* me."

Even if Jesus had been referring to the decree in His Gethsemane prayer, the prayer could not be a model for us in this respect. He knew for certain what the decree was. He had Himself formulated that decree. He knew that the moral will and the decretive will both had the same immediate objective in His life — the cross. But we do not know this much about tomorrow. If we knew that the (unlikely) perfect fulfillment of the precept, and the (certain) perfect fulfillment of the decree would have the same immediate consequences, we might then pray this prayer equivocally with right. But this is precisely the thing we do not know. God's precept for tomorrow is "love," but His decree for tomorrow may be that we shall hate. We cannot pray Christ's prayer for

ourselves, even if *He* did have both the decree and the precept in mind.

Again, Jesus speaks of the Father's will in the Lord's Prayer: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Here He obviously does not refer to the decree. For He marks a difference between the way that things are done on earth and the way they are done in heaven. The decree is done to perfection in both realms. But the precept is done perfectly only in heaven, not on earth. Therefore, this petition refers to the precept, not the decree.

THE Bible gives us many great examples of prayer besides Jesus' own. These prayers are all patterns for us to follow in our devotions. But do any of them offer a petition and then explicitly condition the fulfillment of that petition upon the decree? Can a single petition be cited from anywhere in Scripture to which was added "if it be Thy will"?

The examples recorded in the Bible are on the other side. Many of the great believers are depicted in prayer *for that which they had every reason to believe was contrary to the decree.*

First, there is the instance of Jacob. At the Jabbok he met and wrestled with a man whom some time during the match he recognized as God. Jehovah appeared to desire to be free — He was looking for escape. Did Jacob bow before the ostensible decree of Jehovah? No; rather, he insisted that he would not let Him go until he had received a blessing.

And consider Abraham, to whom God revealed in a theophany that Sodom and Gomorrah would be destroyed. What was the response of the father of believers? Did he say, "If it be Thy will, proceed"? Did he immediately resign to what he had every reason to believe was (and actually *was*) the decree? No. He, too, wrestled with God. He pleaded not once but again and again for the deliverance of these cities. He asked that they be spared for the sake of 50 righteous, then 45, 40, 30, 20, and finally 10. He did not even say, "Spare the cities for the sake of the righteous, if it be Thy will." He could not — God had revealed His decree. And still Abraham prayed — in the face of that revealed will. And the marvel of it is that God listened to his petitions with pleasure, and finally granted them, when He destroyed the cities, by saving the "righteous" ones about whom Abraham was concerned.

We may also point to David. The prophet Nathan revealed to David that the child of his affair with Bathsheba would die. What was David's reaction? We read: "David therefore besought God for the child." He did not say, "Let the child live, if it be Thy will." He *knew* that will. That knowledge was, as a matter of fact, the motive for his prayer. Now he prays that that will may be changed — that the decree may *not* be carried out!

Note, however, the attitude which David manifested when the child had died. That he prayed against a decree of God did not mean that he was not submissive. For when the child was dead, he immediately resigned himself to what God had done. Resignation, however, comes not before but after the fact.

And finally there is the example of Hezekiah. This king had every reason to believe that God had decreed his early death. Neither did he, however, resign himself to the fact. Instead he prayed. The Lord heard his "unsubmissive" prayer, and He gave him added years of life.

WE can do no better than follow the great saints in our prayers. Our mood in prayers should be like theirs. Our sincerity in prayers should match theirs. Our pleading in prayers should be as insistent as theirs.

These qualities of prayer are greatly diminished if we habitually add to our petitions "if it be Thy will." We ought rather to pray persistently for the needs we have. The decree we can leave up to God, who made it and will fulfill it. What that decree for tomorrow may contain, we ought not guess or anticipate. What our petitions will mean in shaping tomorrow — this ought to be our concern when we pray.

THE PROPER USE OF SCRIPTURE

When I expound the Holy Scripture, I must always compass myself by it, that those who hear me, may be profited by the doctrine held forth, and receive edification thereby. If I have not this affection, if I do not edify those that hear me, I commit sacrilege, and profane the Word of God. Those also who read the Holy Scripture, or come to hear the sermon, if they seek any foolish speculations, if they come hither to recreate themselves, they are guilty of profaning the gospel. If we divert the Holy Scripture from its proper use, and seek questions in it, without endeavoring to profit by it, we pollute it.

St. Paul hath taught us that we must come to God with earnest desires, seeing He seeketh nothing but our profit and salvation. He showeth us also that we must not pollute the Holy Scripture, to make it serve our own fancy; but knowing it is God's mind that it should be made profitable to us, we must come thither to be taught: yea, and taught in that which will be profitable for our salvation.

—JOHN CALVIN

The Case for Regional Synods

Howard B. Spaan

I feel as the attorney who enters a hopeless appeal to the governor for a pardon in behalf of his doomed client. However, there is one difference. At least the jury convicting the doomed heard the evidence of the case before reaching its verdict.

In 1957 Synod gave a mandate to a committee to draw up a plan for regional synods. After the committee had sent out a preliminary plan to the classes for constructive comment, the 1958 Synod received three overtures to cancel the study. Had they been adopted, Synod would not have as much as granted its own study committee the courtesy of concluding its study. Now very interestingly the same phenomenon reappears. Overtures to reject regional synods are being filed before the classes have the opportunity to study the report of the synodically appointed committee. Do we have a jury which has reached its verdict without having studied the evidence forthcoming?

The only justification for so strangely treating a committee is to challenge the 1957 decision approving the establishment of regional synods. Yet the grounds submitted in the 1958 overtures were directed against the preliminary study report, at best a tentative plan. It would seem wise for all to hold their peace till the full plan is unveiled. Then it would be proper for the church *to study and consider the plan a year.*

It is my intention to present a case for regional synods. I believe there are good reasons why they merit serious consideration.

(1) *Our growth and size suggests regional synods.* Within the panorama of over 250 Protestant religious bodies in the United States and Canada it is no longer correct to call ourselves a small denomination. Very definitely our 530 churches must be classified as a medium- or averaged-sized denomination.

Our growth predicts the day when major alteration in our denominational structure will be necessary. Consider our growth in the number of classes. It took ninety years to grow to 18 classes. The last eleven years have seen the addition of 12 classes. This means that 40 percent of our classes were organized within the last *tenth* of our entire history. Project this figure over the next quarter century, and you face surprising dimensions.

This project is not visionary. Excluding future Netherlands immigration, internal growth in Canada is certain to give rise to many new churches. More churches mean more classes. Growth in our concentrated church centers is bound to give rise to a number of new classes within the next two decades. Classis Grandville is a recent example. The outpost (isolated) churches are not being overcrowded to such a degree that new churches are urgent. But within the outpost regions the denomination is laboring in some thirty-three places, each one of which is completely capable of becoming a church during the next three or four years. These alone, completely apart from many more projected fields, will create two or three new classes. In fact, in these areas the possibility of new classes is now being explored (northern California, Florida, and the Detroit areas).

As a student of denominational statistics and growth trends, I feel a conservative estimate would be ten new classes during the next decade. This rate of growth will accelerate in later years.

Since a classis is the unit of representation at synod, growth is of prime concern to the constitution of this assembly. Imagine in ten years 180 delegates plus advisory members, bringing the full complement to 200 members! We shall have to do as others do, e.g., Disciples of Christ. We shall have to engage the Civic Auditorium for our annual convention.

The alternative to broadening the unit of representation to regional synods (eight of them with six delegates each) is reducing the number of delegates per classis (Neland Avenue overture of 1953) to two. We might thereby be taken off the proverbial hook for a couple of decades. But the matter is bound to reappear. How much better would it not be to think in terms of long-range planning and gradually adapt and effect a sound plan for our denominational structure. This sound plan means regional synods.

(2) *Regional development begs for regional synods.* This is said to be an argument against them. It is asserted that sectionalism will breed irreconcilable diversity. The implication is that regional synods would abandon the Reformed faith as a norm for development, that the Holy Spirit is unable to lead the church into a solid Biblical expression of faith without the aid of a central denominational office, and that unity is impossible in diversity.

However, when a denomination grows to considerable proportions in a region, there are bound to be specific interests and problems peculiar to such a region. Why should the church-at-large be

asked to struggle with regional responsibilities? These should be met locally. Moreover, as the church grows and is capable of *intensifying its program,* it is duty-bound to develop regionally. Dordt College is a case in point. And we shall see other groupings of classes to support other educational institutions as well as to engage in other regional kingdom causes.

Canadian churches shall not become less Reformed because they are regionally organized. Nor shall they seek independence. They shall become stronger as a Reformed witness (with a growing Christian Reformed loyalty), simply because they shall have to work out, think through, their own responsibilities and address themselves to their own situation. Canadian churches are under a different government, exist in a social structure not *identical* with the American social structure, and face a challenge to become Canadian, which is not identical with the challenge faced by Stateside churches of a generation or two ago to become American.

We find regional development to be urgent in other situations. No one would want to add two Grand Rapids churches to a Florida classis in order to give it size and stability. When there is strength, there must be Classis Florida, composed of southern churches. Grand Rapids churches, although well-seasoned in experience, would be fish out-of-water in Florida. They belong to Grand Rapids classes because of their mutual regional interests. In fact, in our classical alignments we would do well to note the principle of common regional interest. Today in Ohio there are two pieces of legislation dealing with business operations and voting on Sunday. Each Ohio church individually will have to speak. If the churches spoke through Classes Kalamazoo or Chicago South the Ohio legislature would, rightly so, view this action as outside interference. If there were enough churches, there should be Classis Ohio, just as there could be Classis Dakota or Indiana today. Regional interests can best be advanced through regional union, first on a classical level, and then on a regional synodical level. Each area naturally has its common challenges to be met.

Eight regionally oriented synods will be a greater influence for their faith in their respective territories than thirty or fifty independent classes, united only through executive Grand Rapids offices. The success of the Lutheran churches in our area stems from the realization of a common regional responsibility which regional assemblies (akin to the proposed synods) pursue. Pragmatically it is bad business to expect denominational headquarters to do your thinking and acting. The Christian Reformed Church, if she is ever to accept her God-given responsibilities, will have to intensify her witness on a regional scale. We may not allow resources and talents to be wasted.

(3) *The deliberative nature of our assemblies demands regional synods.* In order that our assemblies may be deliberative in character, we must create an atmosphere which promotes a maximum of considered and prayerful discussion. We already find that too many delegates at classis act as a strong deterrent to deliberation. Recently the stated clerk of the new Classis Grandville reported, "The early completion of our work and the free discussion by their elders as well as the ministerial delegates, bore out our belief that a smaller group can be much more efficient than a larger body."

Our classes could do more to create an atmosphere for deliberation. Members of Classis Chatham at its recent meeting sat around a large table. This aided in promoting a most rewarding discussion session.

When I visited the General Assembly of the former Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., I was reminded of a political convention. Resolutions were hammered out by commissions, many of which met long before the Assembly convened. At the sessions of the Assembly it was often necessary to select a floor leader to be a spokesman in floor discussions. Free deliberative discussion was hardly present, for the size of the Assembly prevented it. The Assembly resembled a convention more than a Spirit-led deliberative body.

When I attended the 1958 Synod, I compared it with the 1952 Synod, which I also attended. I could not help noticing that in six years we had become much more like a convention. It was not the lively issue of the United Theological School in Nigeria which caused the 1958 Synod to resemble a convention. Back in 1952 there was the explosive Seminary situation. Moreover, the fine chairmanship of 1958 discouraged conventionism. The *size* of Synod was the determining factor.

Upon the conclusion of 11 hours and 45 minutes of debate on the Nigerian matter, there was a concerted effort to rush for a Saturday adjournment. In order to allow full consideration to administrative matters, it became necessary to table or recommit to study committees such major matters as revisions of the confessions and church order. It was stated that the confession has stood for four hundred years and could stand longer; however, budgets and how they are to be utilized could not. Now if regional synods discharged the home missionary mandate, very little administrative detail would appear on Synod's agenda from such quarters. If the principle of administration from the bottom up prevailed in Foreign Mission and Calvin affairs, Synod would be left with little more than establishing a two-year budget for these endeavors. There could be matters to adjudicate

by way of protest and appeal regarding local administration. But even this would not be too probable.

I kept a record of the number of minutes used for every decision at the 1958 Synod. Four hours of Synod's time were consumed directly in matters that a regional synod could better transact. How much time would have been saved if the principle of administration from the bottom up had been faithfully pursued, is anyone's guess. Moreover, the examination of candidates ought to be conducted by Synod's deputies, the Board of Trustees (as it was in former days), or by some other body. This would net a gain of another eight hours. Think of what the 1958 Synod could have done with an additional twelve hours to give to, for example, confessional revisions. This amount of time represents nearly two synodical days!

(4) *Decentralization necessitates regional synods.* Some have charged that our denomination is falling prey to "executive action in small committees and permanent appointees at top levels" (*The Reformed Journal,* Dec. 1958). Speaking from experience, I can agree that there is a strong temptation for the local church to act independently of executive decisions. When the denomination's wheels grind on regardless of local sensitivities, a feeling of futility is easily bred. Local action which ignores executive decisions can become widely prevalent unless centralization is reversed. However, there is a more basic consideration in support of decentralization, namely, good Presbyterian (Biblical) government. Ruling authority under Christ begins with the local consistory. That which cannot be concluded locally is forwarded to a broader body for advice. Moreover, groups of churches acting in concert require a broader body to discharge their mutual responsibilities. This is a system of government from the bottom (consistory) up (ultimately Synod). Executive action fosters government from the top (Synod) down (consistory).

How do we overcome centralization? Are regional synods a useful vehicle? If they add but another inefficient wheel to the machine, they ought not to be considered.

It has been suggested that we ask the church who has regional synods. I did — the Reformed Church in America. I am in possession of statements of prominent leaders in said church which observe that particular synods do not exist for purposes of decentralization. In fact, they do not even constitute the unit of representation to the General Synod. No attempt has been made to use particular synods as a means to lessen the powers of New York executive offices. Pointing to the Reformed Church, therefore, proves little or nothing. After all there are vehicles and vehicles. A Rambler and a Cadillac are both cars. But one is designed for luxury with a minimum of economy, and the other is designed for economy with only the basic essentials for comfort. Design makes the difference.

I am of a firm conviction that regional synods can be designed to accomplish a great measure of decentralization. By way of example, I should like to suggest how regional synods might accomplish this with reference to the Board of Foreign Missions:

Members: 1 minister, 1 layman from each regional synod (no executive committee).

Meetings: twice annually, plus authority to call emergency sessions.

Task: adopt a broad annual budget for all fields;
select personnel (workers for the fields);
establish field policies;
select new fields, subject to synodical approval;
determine current field expansions in conjunction with Conferences; adjudicate disputes arising on the fields.

In addition to the Board I would suggest:

Secretary of Missions: a co-ordinator or liaison between Board and Conferences.

Conference membership: representative missionaries and competent native leaders; advisory representatives from indigenous church if in existence).

Task: determine how the Board's budget will be spent in local specifics;
employ business manager as chief administrator for the day-by-day business (if field is sufficiently extensive to demand this position).

Such a structure would remove the charge that a particular piece of Christian Reformed geography possesses the power of executive action. Obviously all eight denominational regions would be equally in command at the Board meetings.

At the same time, more administrative authority is placed on the local level. Why should it be necessary for an executive office thousands of miles away to authorize the sending of a missionary to a conference of Bible translators and the payment of his round trip? Is there any point in requiring a central executive office to authorize the gift of a couple hundred dollars to assist in the publication of a mission high school annual or the purchase of a motorcycle needed sorely by a missionary thousands of miles away? Would it not be far better for the local administrators to weigh these needs and determine priority? All that the denominational board is really required to do is to decide on

a broad budget after it has reviewed and weighed the requests of each Conference.

Will this create "boardism?" Boardism occurs when a board becomes the day-by-day business administrator of the fields. On the other hand, policy-making cannot be charged as boardism, for policies are not selected from a variety of possibilities, but must adhere to Biblical teaching and the Church Order. To be sure, the day-by-day decisions required on the field can go wrong, even though there be more appreciation and sensitivity for needs and their priorities. But appeal from such matters will come to the Board for adjudication, when it is evident the matter cannot be resolved by the Conference.

What is possible in Foreign Missions is equally possible with Calvin College and Seminary. In fact, it is more simple to erect a structure containing a good working plan between the Trustees and the administration of College and Seminary.

In working out the decentralization objective in home missions, a different structure is needed:

Regional Home Missions Committee

Membership: 2 ministers, 2 laymen from each classis.

Meetings: twice annually, plus authority to call emergency sessions.

Task: select fields;
recommend personnel;
establish policies governing the fields;
adopt annual budget for salaries, incidentals, and promotional materials.

Regional Home Mission Director

Task: occupy and labor in a specific field;
give part-time attention and work to exploring new fields (a few weeks annually);
function as secretary of the regional committee;
(no promotion work among the churches assigned to him).

Denominational Home Mission Conference

Participants: representatives from all regional synods.

Meetings: biannually.

Authority: advisory to regional home mission committees and to Synod.

Purpose: aid in achieving denominational perspective and co-ordination;
discuss home mission progress, methods, and problems.

Minister of Evangelism (for entire denomination)

Task: provide materials for all phases of home mission work in form of kits, brochures, etc.;
promote the whole enterprise via speaking engagements at churches, fests, classes, regional synods, etc.;
consult with regional synodical committees regularly and with the denominational conference, and thus act as a stimulus to achieve co-ordination between the various regions.

Mission Help Fund

Membership: synodically appointed, located in a specific area as Church Help Fund.

Task: loan funds to fields for houses of worship, manses, and property;
receive repayments from fields after churches are organized;
receive quotas from all churches to equalize the burden of home mission capital investments among all eight regional synods.

It has been charged that decentralization in this manner will hinder home mission progress by preventing prompt action in emergencies. Actually each regional synod will be closer to the emergencies arising within its territory than is a central executive office. Perhaps better judgment will be exercised for just that reason. Distance is readily a barrier to good judgment. Had the home mission executives lived here in Ohio, they would never have transferred a man from Columbus to Alaska, and thence to Oklahoma. Being distant from Columbus, they could not know what damage leaving a field unmanned in a critical formative stage could do. Moreover, there were ministers who could have obtained a leave of absence (for Alaska work) from their churches, which in turn had readily available pulpit and catechetical supplies.

(5) *Continuity of denominational boards requires regional synods.* Our three boards, Calvin, Foreign Missions, and Home Missions, directly responsible to Synod, have been experiencing too large a turnover in their classical representation. We have too few men continuing on these boards to lend continuity of thought and decision. Too many new men are busying themselves with the necessary task of becoming orientated to their new assignments. When scarcely acquainted with their work, too many men are whisked away from board membership via a change of pastorate. Note the *number of changes* within the classical membership of these boards, remembering there are from nineteen members (1950) to twenty-eight members (1958) constituting the total group:

	Foreign Missions	Home Missions	Calvin
1958	10	13	10
1957	14	9	6
1956	7	13	6
1955	6	6	6
1954	10	6	10
1953	10	11	11
1952	8	5	5
1951	5	5	3
1950	7	6	10

To charge that the six-year rule for maximum service is the cause of this large turnover is a gross exaggeration. Outside the year following the adoption of the six-year rule, when the casualty list was particularly large in the Calvin Board, the number of individuals whose work was terminated on account of this rule is very insignificant by comparison with those whose work was terminated via a change of pastorate to another classis.

Consequently, something will have to be done to broaden the unit of representation beyond a classis. This function could quite successfully be realized by a regional synod. If laymen represent regional synods on the boards, we will be assured that one-half of the board will be continuous for the duration of full terms. To equalize the lay and classical membership on the present boards in order to achieve continuity, would create unwieldy boards of sixty members. Accordingly, the continuity provided by lay membership can be better realized through regional synods. As far as the ministerial membership is concerned, we may conclude mathematically that change will be considerably less frequent. Under the present arrangement a man stays on a board if he moves to another church within the same classis. This sometimes occurs. But mathematically it is not too probable that he will remain within the same classis, for there are an average of only 18 churches per classis. The probability of remaining within a regional synod is far greater, for there would be an average of 68 churches per regional synod. To make the regional synod a basic unit for representation on denominational boards will not fully solve the problem of continuity, but it will better our situation by at least 75 percent.

(6) *Economy favors regional synods.* It has been charged that regional synods would prove far more costly in money and time. I know of no way to make an accurate estimate of cost for regional synods. I would, however, venture to say that a consideration of mileage can give us an idea of what to anticipate. Before comparing the two systems with respect to mileage, I was certain that the total number of miles travelled for all meetings on all levels would be about equal in both systems. But to my amazement, the total number of miles travelled over a two-year period under our present system is 988,000 as compared with 497,000 miles under the proposed regional synod system. *The total number of miles travelled would be halved.*

Space does not permit a detailed round-trip table of computation, but I may remark that the figures above were computed in this way: The mileage from a central point in each classis (e.g., Calgary in Alberta South) to Grand Rapids was determined. Accordingly, the total number of miles for all classes to Grand Rapids is 46,610. Herewith follows the summary:

46,610	total miles from all classes to Grand Rapids
x 4	delegates to annual Synod
186,440	total miles for synodical session
+273,860	miles for meeting of 3 boards (exclusive of lay members on boards)
+ 33,750	miles for Executive Committee meetings of the 3 boards
494,050	total miles annually
x 2	(two-year period in order to compare both systems)
988,010	total miles

In computing the mileage under the regional system, the round-trip mileage from a central regional synod (e.g., Bellflower in Pacific) to Grand Rapids was established. This figure was multiplied by the six delegates to the biannual synod, with the result of a total of 75,340 miles for the eight regional synods. The same system was used to compute mileages between classical centers and meeting places of regional synod (e.g., Pella, Wellsburg, Minneapolis, Edgerton, Sioux Falls, to Orange City, site of Midwest sessions). For the geographically spread out Atlantic Synod it was allowed that two of the eight delegates from Classis Hackensack would be from Florida. Similar allowances were made for Classes Hudson, British Columbia, and Pacific. Herewith follows a summary for regional synods:

89,340	miles annually for the eight regional synodical sessions
x 2	period for comparison (two years)
178,680	total miles for regional sessions.
75,340	miles for biannual general synod at Grand Rapids
198,600	miles for Calvin and Foreign Mission Boards for a two-year period
44,000	miles for regional home mission meetings for a two-year period
496,620	total miles.

Do not say the introduction of regional synods will raise cost. They are really more economical.

Finally, a word ought to be said about the matter of representation. The general synod will be reduced from 120 to 48 voting delegates. Accordingly, the Boards of Calvin and Foreign Missions would be reduced to the size they were over a decade ago. The charge will be made that the power of decision (exclusive of administration — removed by the suggested plan) in fewer hands constitutes what we broadly term "boardism." Does it?

Did you ever consider that the very word we employ for our representatives at Synod — "delegate" — is not germane to Presbyterian polity? A delegate is a representative from a specific constituency empowered to act *for it.* Although the delegate is not instructed as to how he shall use his power of decision, yet there is more than a fond wish that the expressed desires of his sending body form his decision. But do we really intend thus to describe the men sent to Synod?

A far better term is "commissioner." It means someone who has received a commission to perform an office. The office is that of ruling in the name of Christ and giving expression as the Holy Spirit through Holy Writ leads at such deliberative assemblies as classis, regional synod, and general synod. I feel we have overplayed the sense of delegate in terms of representation. A delegate is first of all responsible to God, not to classis. He is fulfilling an office.

It may then be argued that there would be too few commissioners at Synod. But a few men filled with the sense of office and adequate to their office are to be preferred to a large number of delegates. Moreover, to allow for wider deliberative participation in major matters, regional synods could be required to pass on decisions of general synod before they were declared passed. This would create wider deliberative participation, which some fear will be lost.

LETTERS TO THE JOURNAL

SIRS:

I have read with great interest the article of Dr. Daane concerning the perfection of God. If it can be commended for anything, it is for its novelty. We are living in a time of novelties. Not only are we treated to all sorts of new things in the realm of science, such as the A-bomb, Sputniks, etc., but — no less striking — to a great number of new meanings being put into old words. Think of the new meanings put into the words peace and democracy by men who are disturbing the peace of the world, and who are enemies of the kind of democracy which hitherto has worn the name. It seems to be true in the case of religious terminology as well. *Geschichte* is no longer to be considered mere history; election is no longer a choice of the one and the rejection of the other; sin is no longer a plain failure to do what God has openly commanded. Among the new meanings put in old words we can now count the contention of Dr. Daane that the perfection of God is not what men have always thought it to be. All this is done with the immediate purpose of making the command of God, "Be ye perfect," an attainable goal, and with the further purpose of basing some sort of argument in favor of his view of Common Grace upon it.

It is argued that we cannot maintain the old, simple, man-on-the-street connotation of the word perfection with reference to the text in Matthew 5, for then the command would be impossible to obey. God would not give a command to His people that cannot be obeyed by them. Hence we seem to be forced to the conclusion that the perfection of God which we are in some way to equal must be something different from the usual thing that is meant by perfection. And since Dr. Daane is in apparent agreement with the Heidelberg Catechism, that even the most holy men, in this life, have only a small beginning of obedience to the law of God, he reasons that at least this command must be something that is attainable. Perfection in the keeping of the law of God is manifestly unattainable. But perfection similar to God's perfection could be attainable if we can find another meaning for the word.

The question immediately arises, Why we should single out this command of Christ, "Be ye perfect," to say of it alone that God would not command it if it were unattainable? Why should we not become out and out perfectionists, and say of all the commandments and of the whole law that since God gave them we must conclude that they are indeed attainable? Why do we not contend that perfection in the keeping of God's law is possible for true believers, and that there is something seriously wrong with them if they are found imperfect even in this life. Of all commandments of God we could say, "God would not command them if they were impossible to obey."

Dr. Daane seems to imply that if the command is unattainable men are justified if they forget about trying to reach perfection. Also that God would be unfair to require it of us. But it is incorrect to reason thus. We do not take such an attitude in science. Though we cannot draw a perfect circle, we do not let ourselves be content with an oval. We just strive to make our circles as near perfect as we can. Why should we take a different attitude towards God's law?

But can we say that Christ would not have given us the command, "Be ye perfect," if the goal were unattainable? He could have some very cogent reasons for doing so. Not only the one mentioned by Dr. Daane, that it is to make us realize our sinfulness; a second and strong reason, and for

born-again people a very strong one, is that He wants to convey to them that they *may never be satisfied with anything less than perfection.* A practical working out of this thought would be that we can always think of ourselves as being able to come twice as near to perfection as we are now. The command, "Be ye perfect," obliges us to do all in our power to double our achievements in the keeping of God's command. What is there to hinder? To be imperfect is sin. To be satisfied with the present degree of imperfection is more so. With the first of these sins we may take comfort in the fact that "He knows that we are dust, He knows our frame." With the second God gives us only blame, which remains unforgiven till we confess and leave it.

We need to go a step farther. The command, "Be ye perfect," is also one of those of which the Heidelberg Catechism says, "We have only a small beginning." That is true even if you give it what I would call the emasculated significance that Daane gives it.

God's own Word tells us that perfection here on earth is not possible. Why should He take the trouble to do so? No doubt to save us from despair. Those most eager to please God stand in danger of despair when they observe the lack of progress in their lives. At such a time God says to them, "I have never promised that while on earth you would be made perfect. So be of good cheer and travel on."

Yet it is not strictly true that what God commands is not possible. The teaching of Scripture warrants us to say no more than, "In this life, upon this earth, in this age, it is impossible." It has often been said that what God commands He also promises. The promise is that some day God's own people will be as perfect as He is. That should spur us mightily to seek to obtain as nearly as possible *now* that which we will receive in perfection hereafter.

Neither does the statement of our Savior, "Except your righteousness exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven," support the contention of Dr. Daane. His argument runs substantially as follows: Scribes and Pharisees have a righteousness. But theirs is not good enough. There must therefore be something greater. That greater righteousness is the perfection of God, attainable and attained by us. That perfection in both God and man turns out to be a doing of something beyond what the justice of God's law requires. In God it is providing salvation for the sinner; in Christ it is doing the law "*for us*"; in us it is giving our neighbor more love than the second table requires, such as praying for our enemies, loving those that do not love us, doing good to those who have not done good to us, as the heathen and publican fail to do.

Questions rise at once. Just what is wrong with the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees? Must we say that if they have fully kept the law they still do not have enough? Is it true that they are on the right track, only not travelling far enough, stopping along the way or not going fast enough? Can we say that the deeds they did were really acceptable deeds in the sight of God, only they did not have enough of them?

I think here we should let the Scripture tell us what was wrong. Hebrews 11 tells us that without faith it is impossible to please God. Our Compendium of the Christian Religion describes the good works of which true righteousness consists as only those which proceed from a true faith and are done according to the law of God and to His glory. Now it is certain that one of the things lacking in the righteousness of the scribes, *et al.*, is true faith and we can think of Jesus as saying, "Unless your righteousness proceeds from a true faith you cannot enter the kingdom of God." Secondly, though after a fashion the good works of the Pharisees were according to the law of God, Jesus was finding much fault with them, right here in Matthew 5. In another passage He accused them of neglecting the weightier things of the law. Thirdly, as for their purpose, which should be the glory of God, Jesus said they did not have it. They did them to be seen and honored of men. Fourthly, in the Parable of the Publican and the Pharisee Jesus shows that the purpose of the Pharisee in seeking to please God, i.e., in seeking to develop a righteousness, was to lay up a stock of credits with God, and on the part of God to pile up an accumulation of obligations. We therefore conclude that it is incorrect to say that the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was all right as far as it went. It was really all wrong as far as it went. A righteousness that does not proceed out of a true faith may show much that closely resembles what God requires, but in it all the sinner still maintains himself as the knower of good and evil, one who is not only acquainted with both good and evil but one who consults his own judgments, his likes and dislikes, in order to know what is good and evil.

In that light we are to learn the nature of the perfection that is required of scribes and Pharisees and of ourselves. And the conclusion is that as God is as good as He can be and as good as He ought to be (who creates the ought-ness for Him?), so we ought to be exactly as good as we can be and as we ought to be. (God creates the ought-ness for man). God's perfection is that with all the omniscience He possesses, with all His truthfulness, He finds that He answers fully to all that He owes Himself and to all His creatures. Or, Dr. Daane's strictures on negative statements to the contrary notwithstanding, God's perfection is the fact that in God, in what He is and what He does, there is no improvement necessary or possible. There is no possible reason for wanting Him more just, more holy, more pure, more loving, more anything than He is. And Jesus says, "Be and do likewise. Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." *Teleios* represents God as though He were aiming at being all that all the revelation of God implies, and succeeding fully. This is an anthropomorphism, but a useful one. It says that as for us, we are to strive, to pray, and to hope for that perfect end of the trail, the ideal of being *all that we ought to be.*

Certainly the perfection of God emulated by us does not mean an achievement on our part by which we merit the right to enter into the kingdom of heaven. Neither is the word synonymous with the righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and

Pharisees. Dr. Daane speaks of the righteousness of God as expressed in Romans 3:21ff. and in Philippians 3:9, but he does not make entirely plain how he thinks it should be understood. If it is taken to mean the fact that God is righteous or to mean a deed by which God obtains a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, than it cannot be said to be apart from the law. If God commands, "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind and with all thy strength," and then fails even for a moment to love Himself in the same manner and to the same extent, His righteousness is gone. If He would excuse a part of the human race from the obligation to love their neighbors as themselves, His righteousness would be gone.

If Dr. Daane does not take the righteousness of God as used in Romans 3 as something to be equaled and achieved by man, instead of one provided by God and imputed to us, he has failed to express himself clearly. Charity bids us to give him the benefit of the doubt, but he owes it to his church to express himself more clearly on that matter. Philippians 3 says that the righteousness is *ek theou*, not *tou theou*, genitive case. Romans 4 calls it a righteousness imputed without the law. It is not the merit of God's righteousness that is imputed unto us, much less achieved by us, but it is the merit of the Mediator, the man, Christ Jesus, that is imputed unto us. And the merit was merited by nothing more or less than a perfection, in satisfying the requirements of the law of God. Cursed is every one — He bore the curse. Thou shalt love thy God with all thy heart — He loved with all His heart. He did both perfectly. His righteousness exceeded that of the scribes in just this, that it was perfect. His perfection was not equaling the scribes and Pharisees, plus doing something more. His perfection was doing without flaw that which the scribes and Pharisees had not even begun to do.

Dr. Daane wants to define the righteousness of God in such a way that God remains free to have grace for the sinner. He rightly rejects the position of H. Hoeksema, whose reasoning is such that God cannot have any grace for those that are not in the Savior Jesus. But I must demur when Dr. Daane would imply that anything that restricts the freedom of God cannot on that account be considered true. There are things that God is not free to do. He Himself says so through the Apostle John. "He cannot deny Himself." And we would do well to define God's righteousness — taking it in the sense that God is righteous — as God's refusal to deny Himself. And taken in that sense it is very nearly synonymous with His justice, which is God's divine reaction against everything and everyone that denies Him or that denies anything that is true of Him. Thus it is *mere* justice, not in the sense of giving man his due but in the sense of demanding for every *one* his due. The *first one whose due God requires is and must always be Himself.* The first and great commandment is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." God's righteousness is that He loves Himself in just that manner and measure. God's justice is His reaction against those who refuse or fail to do so. If that is the first and great commandment, then the command of Christ, "Be ye perfect," cannot be anything that transcends or goes beyond the first. It can only mean to require of us to do perfectly what the first and great commandment (and the second like unto it) demands of us. *Mere* righteousness, *mere* justice and *mere* perfection include all these things.

Hence God's great and miraculous act of saving sinners must be done in a manner that does not involve His denying Himself. Hence the incarnation, hence the laying upon Him the iniquity of us all, hence the imputing to the sinner whom God wants to save not God's quality of righteousness but the merited righteousness of our Savior. This merited righteousness of Christ in satisfying the whole demand of the law — the curse as well as obedience — can be called and is called the righteousness of God, conceived by God, provided by Him, now acceptable to Him, and made ours by His act of giving us credit for what Jesus has done. It certainly is in no way a righteousness of man until it is imputed to him of God.

We might better defend God's right to be more than our logic can comprehend. Daane says, given Berkhof's conception of God's righteousness and justice, Hoeksema must be deemed correct. There can be no common grace. Human reasoning determines what God can be and do, whether God can have some love for those to whom He does not impute the righteousness of Christ. It even comes to question the possibility that God should impute the merited righteousness of Christ to any sinner. So Berkhof's definition of righteousness and justice must be wrong. Not so. Berkhof simply tries to take all the Bible says of God's righteousness and all that it says of common grace, and when he is unable to see how the two can be squared, he ascribes this to the limitation of human reason.

Sincerely yours,
(Rev.) H. Moes

REPLY

I am grateful for Rev. Moes's letter and appreciative of its spirit. He raises many interesting theological matters, but my comments must be few

1. Rev. Moes objects that my definition of the perfection of God and of His children should be "something different from the usual thing that is meant by perfection." But does he really believe that the Biblical idea of God's perfection ought not to differ from "the old, simple, man-on-the-street connotation of the word?"

2. Is it not just because he derives his idea of perfection from the man on the street that he contends that the perfection of Matthew 5 marks the Christian only in the next life? Yet did not Jesus teach that this perfection marks the children of God when in this life they love their enemies? And does not Jesus teach that this perfection is the righteousness required for *entrance* into the Kingdom of Heaven?

3. Does the Bible really make a special point of telling us that we shall never be perfect on earth so as to keep us from despair? Is there any Biblical text to the effect, "I [God] have never promised that while on earth you would be made perfect. So be of good cheer and travel on"? Perfection, as defined by Rev. Moes, would in the light of Jesus' demand, arouse despair. Yet Jesus in Matthew 5 is defining the characteristics of the children of the Kingdom, not teaching despair. Rev. Moes's idea of despair stems from his own idea of perfection and

creates for him the necessity of writing his own Biblical text in order to overcome this despair.

4. If, as Rev. Moes asserts, the Heidelberg Catechism teaches that we have a small beginning of this "Be ye perfect," then there *is* a kind of perfection possible and actual in this life. For the *beginning* of perfection is nothing other than the beginning of *perfection.* At this point he is not only *not* himself using the definition of perfection accepted by the man on the street, but the definition of the saints (they who dare in this life to call themselves saints!). At this point he sees what I mean by perfection, and agrees with it.

5. I cannot follow Rev. Moes's definitions of God's righteousness and God's justice. He defines the first as God's refusal to deny Himself, and adds that this is very nearly synonymous with His justice. But he goes on and asserts that God's righteousness consists in this that God keeps the first table of the law perfectly, and then adds that God's justice is His reaction against those who refuse to so love Him. From this I do not get a clear picture of his idea of God's righteousness, nor of His justice. But two things do appear. First, in this idea of righteousness there does not appear a love or grace for man the sinner; there is nothing of that righteousness of God which is the power of God unto salvation. Nor is there anything in his idea of righteousness which would in the lives of God's children lead them to love their enemies. Second, though Rev. Moes does not intend it, the idea of "God under law" peeks around the corner. We are told that God's perfection consist in this, that God fully answers to what He *owes* Himself and His creatures. God perfectly keeps the law, both as respects Himself and as respects man. But here the divine perfection or righteousness is merely justice. God gives to Himself what He owes to Himself; He gives to man what He owes to man. Here God appears under law and righteousness because He gives Himself and His creatures their due. But this is mere justice — and God is bound to be just. Here there is nothing of a divine freedom that can — if it will — love the sinner and enemy. Since God's perfection (or righteousness) is defined exclusively in reference to law, it becomes mere justice, and God is no longer free to go beyond law, to grant that which He does *not* owe either to Himself or to His creatures, namely, grace. In short, God is not free to be just or unjust — as He might choose, but He is free to have grace and mercy upon whom He will. And this is the perfection of God, that He freely bestows what the law does not oblige Him to bestow, what the sinner by law cannot claim, namely, grace.

6. And now, briefly, a comment on a matter on which Rev. Moes says I have not spoken plainly but owe it to my church to speak plainly. I think, though I am not absolutely sure, that I know what he has in mind. I think it has to do with the righteousness by which we are saved. If I understand him correctly he believes that we are not saved by God's own righteousness, but by the righteousness of Jesus viewed merely as a man. This seems to be the point of his assertion that in Philippians 3 the "righteousness of God" is "from" God but not "of" God, which I think he means further to elucidate by his assertion that we are not saved by the imputation of God's righteousness to us, but by the imputation of the righteousness of "the man, Christ Jesus." If I understand him, he is not sure that I believe this. I candidly admit that I do not accept such a formulation of the righteousness by which we are saved.

A righteousness which is "from" God is by that very fact and language "of" God. And Paul teaches plainly that we are saved by God's *own* righteousness, a righteousness which is "apart from the law." "But now apart from the law a righteousness of God hath been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets" (Rom. 3:21). This righteousness is said to be "of" God, "apart from the law"; the law only bears witness to it, for while it establishes the law, it goes beyond law, or perhaps more correctly, arises beyond law. We are not saved by the righteousness of Christ viewed merely as a man — such a righteousness would be a merely human righteousness. The Heidelberg Catechism teaches plainly that we cannot be saved by a mere creature. The Son of God became man, but we are not saved by Jesus viewed merely as a man. This is not only an improper separation of the divine and the human in Jesus. It also quite beclouds the fact that we are saved by the righteousness and obedience, the suffering and death of the Son of God. Viewed as a man, Jesus would have been obligated to keep the law, but He could have done so only for Himself. Such a righteousness could not have saved others. Only as the Son of God can He keep the law, suffer, and die *for us.* And doing it as the Son of God for *us,* He reveals God's *own* righteousness, and is He whom God hath made unto us wisdom and righteousness. In this "for us" is that righteousness of God disclosed, the righteousness which is His perfection, for it is the disclosure of His *grace.* And *as such* the perfection of God is not the usual thing that is meant by perfection, the old, simple meaning given it by the man on the street. It is indeed something new. Not as new as A-bombs and Sputniks. But new — as the good news of the gospel is new. And this is not to "emasculate" the term to render it easily attainable; it is, rather, to see it full with the fullness of the gospel.

SIRS:

I read with interest and some appreciation the article "The Future of Our Christian Schools" by Dr. James Daane (*Reformed Journal,* April, 1959). I hereby would like to share my comments on it.

First of all, I object to the length of his article. As a scholarly man, Dr. Daane has the ability to write the same thing without giving his readers a long treatment of the issue. It surely is not a mark of scholarship to tire people with such long articles — they do not become convinced in this way, but by what the article itself conveys.

Dr. Daane does not reveal much charity for Mr. Geerdes in his article, and though Dr. Daane has proved some of the weaknesses of Mr. Geerdes' article, I nevertheless take exception and protest to Dr. Daane, and Rev. Koops, for that matter, when they advise Mr. Geerdes to stay clear of Theology.

I fail to see what wrong a person who is not a theologian is doing when he or she steps into the field of Theology for an answer to an important subject, such as Christian Education. Do not Theology's answers speak to and affect all of life — Christian Education, too? Just to advise someone

to stay in his own field does not solve the problem being discussed, if there be a problem.

If brothers Daane and Koops are in want of a more involved or intellectual answer concerning the right of our Christian Schools to exist, instead of the "simple" answer given by brother Geerdes, "the *terra firma of* God's Word," then let them be the ones to give it. However, let it not be a cold, abstract and meaningless answer.

We do not tell theologians to stay clear of Education or any other subject. In the same issue one can read an article by a Calvin Professor writing on the T.C.N.N. problem, which is a problem being taken up by the Christian Reformed Church. And yet, we may not advise him not to voice his opinion — this would smack of Roman Catholicism.

I had thought Dr. Daane would give his readers a realistic picture of our Christian Schools — what is right or wrong with them. However, to the readers' disappointment he scrutinizes an article written by a Mr. Geerdes, a principal of one of our Christian Schools in California.

It is my hope that the *Journal* will carry an article in support of Christian Education, written with the same enthusiasm that Dr. Daane showed when he raised questions about it.

In conclusion, I would like to pose a question to Dr. Daane. Does he think the light is burning brightly in American Public Education, with its teaching of evolution which is having a demoralizing effect upon the Home, Church, and Government? Has Public Education brought mankind closer to God? Also, I would like to say that if there appears to be no theological ground for the existence of Christian Schools, then neither is their theological ground for our Seminary, Colleges, and future University — for there is no direct teaching in the Bible to establish them. However, theology is the basis of, and for, all life!

Humbly and respectfully yours,
PETER J. SLUYS

P. S. I enjoyed reading the article "The American Revolt against Freemasonary" by Dr. Peter Hoekstra.

Please send me 1 copy of the next four (4) issues of the *Reformed Journal,* for which one dollar is enclosed. I am a former subscriber to your noble *Journal,* back in 1949.

SIRS:

The sophistry, sarcasm, and semi-sophistication of Dr. Daane's article in the April issue of the *Reformed Journal* scarcely does more than give evidence of evasion.

Would it be possible for a theologian, self-styled or otherwise, to indicate in print what educational relevancies, if any, are to be deduced from the field from which non-theologians are advised to keep out?

Kindly attempt to make the article intelligible by avoiding double-talk, be it theological or otherwise.

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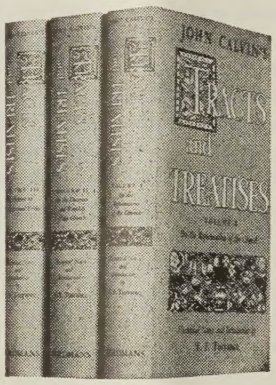

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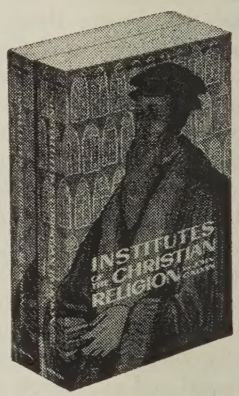

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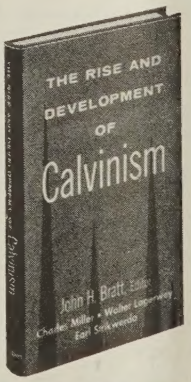

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